

Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
March 21, 2007
2:00 p.m.
MINUTES

Members present:

James Chalmers
Stephen Cozart
Ryan Jenkins
Werner Panchenko
Don Vanderryt

Members absent:

Joe Diamond

Staff present:

Brad Baker
Deb Grinde

Agenda approved as submitted for this meeting with no exception.

Minutes for meeting held on January 17, 2007 approved as drafted and submitted.

Persons to Appear

None

Reports and Statistics

Reviewed reports for months of November 2006 through February 2007. Those calls that were not responded to were reviewed thoroughly including Mutual Aid call types.

Correspondence

This committee reviewed an email sent to B. Baker from R. Collins, Pace, FL. Mr. Collins provided an oral presentation to the committee detailing the lists for each of the (MSBU) fire districts he made regarding the websites. He suggested a deadline to the committee of August 2007 for re-configuring those sites and listed the improvements he would like to see on the websites. Some of his ideas to improve the MSBU sites include a listing and/or photo of each piece of equipment, the type of apparatus, the year and model, the condition, mileage on the vehicles, the length of service to date and the expected service life of the apparatus if not already exceeded, etc. Mr. Collins stated that if the content of the pages are standardized, the information available on the sites would dictate what the needs are for each (MSBU) fire district.

S. Cozart questioned how often the websites are updated and B. Baker indicated that they are updated on an occasional basis only.

R. Collins added that the photos are appropriate and necessary; one example included a piece of equipment that is actually a converted milk truck. He stated that the information will help make the public aware that replacements are necessary.

Old Business

Fire Hydrants

The final draft for the proposed letter to the water purveyors was approved unanimously by this committee. A copy will be mailed to the water purveyors. The final version of the proposed letter to the Board of County Commissioners was also approved by this committee. The letter will be submitted to the BOCC.

R. Collins requested a copy of each of the letters preferably in a digital format.

New Business

Fire Services Proposal

A copy of the Santa Rosa County Fire/Rescue Services Plan was distributed to committee members for review. The plan was developed by the Fire/Rescue Executive Group which, initially, consists of the fire chiefs for each of the MSBU (MSBU) fire districts and B. Baker, Emergency Services Coordinator, Santa Rosa County.

B. Baker reviewed the history of the districts and met with all (MSBU) districts. At this point, they started putting a plan together. It was determined that the districts will retain each of their own Boards of Directors. Their budgets will be combined so as to centralize the purchases and standardize the equipment. This concept was adopted in order to reduce costs. It was determined that standardizing their gear would help to reduce maintenance costs.

In order to provide reasons for the need of additional funding B. Baker highlighted the issues facing the (MSBU) fire districts including:

- It is evident that there is a need for some paid staff at the Pace and Skyline departments; the intent is that they will be available to assist other departments whenever necessary also.
- In addition, future requirements indicate that there will be a need to have a type of structured (paid) crew in the north end of the county especially during the daytime hours; a huge improvement will be anticipated if and when this occurs.
- It has been determined that 70 – 80% of the calls are medical related incidents.

The (MSBU) fire districts are working together toward the same end. Their efforts have been submitted to the Board of County Commissioners in the form of the Fire/Rescue Services Plan. It has been adopted as a working plan and the intent is that public hearings will be scheduled to review the MSBU funding in August 2007. The recommendation for funding submitted by the Fire/Rescue Executive Group was based on square footage. This group decided that this would be a more equitable method of determining the rates. The five year plan was included and indicates their intention of utilizing paid firefighters in the future.

R. Collins, Pace, FL

It is Mr. Collins belief that the county has not recruited well considering the fact that the two-tier system is utilized in our county. He noted that the report from Fitch and Associates recommended that a new provider should be responsible for recruiting first responders. B. Baker acknowledged that the new provider would have a vested interest in a first responder program. The (MSBU) fire districts have been challenged to create a medical response group of first responders. We have to remember that a volunteer requires the two hundred (200) hours of training. If a person is trained as a first responder and responds to calls we would assist them in evolving into a firefighter. B. Baker stated that it is important to remember that whether we are fighting one (1) fire or many fires, we will still require the same equipment. The more personnel we have to pull from the better!

R. Collins suggested that an independent advisory group for the fire services group may be necessary. The group would provide further input and second opinions for overview of the group.

S. Cozart agreed and stated that his thoughts were that this committee be involved with the administration and integration of the Fire/Rescue Executive Group. It would provide some oversight and direction to that group. The question would be whether involvement by citizens is necessary. He is concerned that this governing body does not include any private citizens.

J. Chalmers is happy that they are working together, is impressed with the working document and wonders what will be the cohesive factor to keep the group functioning. B. Baker indicated that if the (MSBU) fire district does not participate they would not receive any funding for their district.

S. Cozart agreed that it is a great working plan and that they are heading in the right direction. He has not seen a new ordinance to realize if there are any problems that may need to be resolved.

W. Panchenko asked which districts would feel the results of the change to the rates. B. Baker stated that the group does not include Holley-Navarre, Navarre Beach, Midway, Avalon or City of Milton districts; it does include those MSBU units that are non-legislative. Any issues related to policies and procedures that are not related to funding such as mutual aid agreements, haz-mat, trench rescue, etc. will include other legislative districts.

D. Vanderryt questioned how the funding would be dispersed. He wondered if it would be based on population, size of the district or any other factor(s).

B. Baker advised that the funding distribution will be based on their needs as determined by the Executive Group. There will not be a set amount of funding that each district will receive. He stressed that life-safety will be the most important consideration; a first priority item might be a first-out truck. The Executive Group will base their decisions in that manner. The Executive Group will review and prioritize all of the needs of the districts as a group and make their determinations based on what is needed most. He provided examples and stated that it may be determined that equipment needs to be rotated according to volume, need, anticipated service years, etc. The districts will bring their needs, to the table and justify those needs.

S. Cozart questioned who would own or hold the title to the vehicles. B. Baker stated that is still to be determined.

R. Jenkins stated that this seems to resemble a county fire service; Escambia County has used this method for their fire departments. B. Baker stated that one of Escambia County's flaws, though, was that they disregarded their volunteers.

It is not our intention to disregard our volunteers; we must depend on our volunteers. They are very important to us and our intent is to keep them active in our county. We intend to have a professional group of firefighters in Santa Rosa County.

S. Cozart commended B. Baker and stated that we are taking the right first step toward becoming the best that we can be!

He questioned B. Baker regarding the rate of the tax and what the percentage increases would be. B. Baker stated that the taxes collected would go from approximately \$1.2 million to \$2.6 million, which would indicate an approximate 100% increase. S. Cozart questioned how the particular rates, e.g. \$75.00, came into effect. B. Baker indicated that he reviewed other counties' scales. To S. Cozart's question regarding the taxation of the vacant property and the agricultural property within the county, B. Baker stated that there are minimal differences and will remain generally the same.

S. Cozart stated that this committee should show their support of this plan by sending a letter to the BOCC indicating our support. This passed unanimously and S. Cozart will bring a draft of a letter addressing this issue to the next meeting.

B. Baker stated that in accordance with the recommendation of Fitch and Associates, the county will acquire one Medical Director who, in turn, will provide unified medical direction within the county. B. Baker stated that the intent is for the first responders and EMTs for each of the fire districts, Midway ALS providers and the newly selected provider to follow the same procedures.

As the Emergency Services Coordinator for the county, B. Baker has implemented a bi-monthly Q.I. meeting in order to critique selected calls minute by minute to include the determinants, EMS response, times, etc. according to protocols. They have made a lot of progress in this area. S. Cozart stated what a great part of the program this has become.

J. Chalmers, Rural Metro, agrees with the activities taken on by the Fire/Rescue Group. He stated that a lot of good information has come from the Q.I. meetings.

B. Baker stated that he is working with the county attorney regarding an ordinance for the Medical Director position and the related protocols.

S. Cozart commended B. Baker on the huge amount of progress that has been made through the past year in the Fire Services area.

Public Comments

R. Collins, Pace, FL

- Mr. Collins suggests that in attempting to sell the idea of a rate increase we should provide statistical data based on the norm (at a national level, not a state level). We need to indicate what savings might be realized to their insurance rates. This information should be included as a part of a whole package.
- Mr. Collins distributed an email he had received regarding the FireServices Plan. It was reviewed by this committee and he explained that he (Mr. Collins) provided the writer with some feedback regarding what he (Mr. Collins) knew about the plan. He stated that he attempted to make the writer more aware of the issues related to the increases and indicated that the writer was placated.
- S. Cozart agreed that publicizing the issues will help the citizens have a better understanding of the process and the reasons for the increases.
- Mr. Collins stated that the general public tends to say "no" and consequently, more education will be necessary to sell the increase.

W. Panchenko asked whether all of the MSBU districts will be requesting a new ISO rating or only selected districts. B. Baker responded by indicating that our goal is for an ISO rating of six (6). He indicated that our water system may hinder achieving a lower score. There are some things that can occur to improve the scores though. As an example, when prioritizing the building of a new fire station, the five (5) mile standard will be taken into consideration.

Jerry Lambert, Jay, FL

Mr. Lamberts stated that he has an interest in the Fire/Rescue Plan. He is concerned that the committee is buying into a program and that the public should have a role to play in the system. He is concerned that the plan was approved the way it was written, when, in fact, the addition of public input was not included. He pointed out that the 1978 MSBU ordinance was written to reduce the insurance rates also. He is also concerned that everything has not been decided and everyone seems to be buying into this concept. He is opposed to sending a letter to the BOCC when, in fact, not everyone agrees that public input is not necessary and not pointing that out.

Mr. Lambert disagrees with the idea that the group of chiefs is able to submit their own budgets to themselves for approval. He believes that the Executive Group should be made up of members of the public with an appeal process built in to that process. It seems that the only way that the public can have any input is at the very end of the process and in front of the Board of County Commissioners.

J. Chalmers stated that his insurance company has not reduced his rate even though the fire department is directly across the street from him. He contends that the departments need good equipment, training, etc in order to perform well.

However, he does not disagree that there should not be public input on the committee.

B. Baker stated that the ISO ratings are partially based on the condition of the equipment, gear, etc. He also stated that if the ISO rating reaches a rating of ten (10) then the property owner will not get any insurance at all. He also indicated that once we get the rating down it must be maintained. He believes that the public should attend the Fire Department open meetings as an avenue for input.

S. Cozart questioned whether there has been any discussion of having any public citizen in the Executive Group.

B. Baker stated that it was considered. They will need knowledgeable people making good decisions. There are currently checks and balances in place with the Boards of Directors.

S. Cozart stated that interested and conscientious people should be able to make these types of considerations.

R. Collins, Pace, FL

Mr. Collins brought it to the attention of this committee that the schedules for the monthly meetings listed on the websites are not accurate.

He believes that correcting the information on the websites would be advantageous for the departments.

As a citizen, he has not received notices from his fire district that the Board of Directors may be reviewing the budget, when elections are held, etc.

He believes that the districts should hold public hearings within their districts and advise the public as to when they will be having budget meetings.

He stated that a Fire Chief's Meeting indicates that the meeting is for Chiefs only.

Even firefighters believe that they are not able to attend those meetings.

There seems to be no notification system in place.

Mr. Collins believes that the public needs to feel a part of all of these issues.

No further discussion and meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Next meeting will be held on April 18, 2007 at 2:00 p.m.